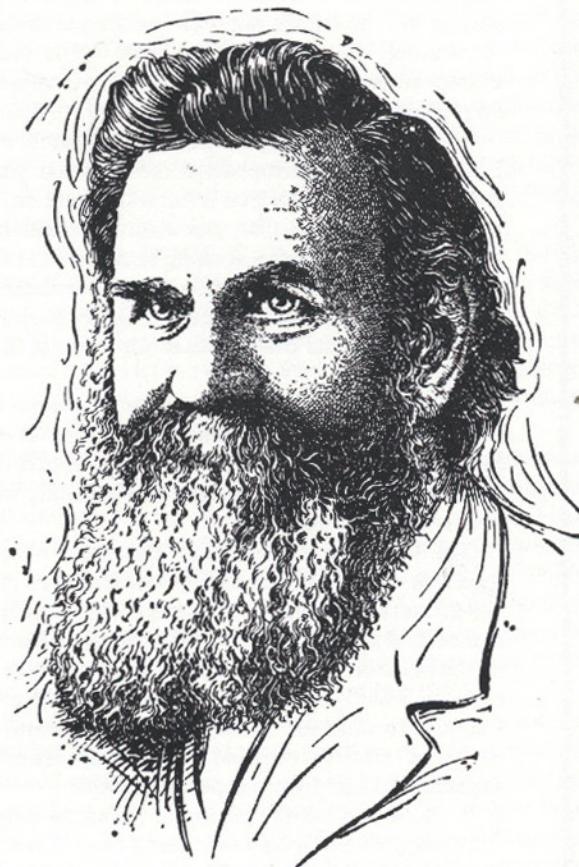


Daniel David Palmer (below), chiropractic's founder, was influenced by the frontier experiences of North America and the post-Civil War industrialization of the United States. The writer suggests that the "Palmer crest" (left) was from an expired line of English gentry with unlikely linkage to the New England family that emigrated to Canada in the 1830s. D. D. Palmer's calling card (below) in Portland, Oregon after he finished his 1,000-page book in 1910, reflected the founder's view of his role in the formulation of the new healing art.



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Defining The Debate: An Exploration of the Factors That Influenced Chiropractic's Founder

PIERRE GAUCHER-PERSLHERBE, D.C., Ph.D.*

The author sets the stage for his 1982 dissertation on D. D. Palmer and the formulation, discovery and early evolution of his new alternative school of healing in late 19th Century America. Placing these events in the framework of the post-frontier United States, with its Puritan, Anglo-Saxon and Republican traditions, this French historian and chiropractor also suggests that the contemporary scientific knowledge—or lack of it—were factors in the development of Palmer's thought and in the establishment of his particular science, art and philosophy.

*"Certes, and by my sowle
This world is al beshrewed;
Muche they fare with falsenes,
Both lered and lewed . . . "*

Anonymous lament on the medical profession (c. 1320)
(Medical Times 1861)

It is not easy to explain in simple terms something which one does with passionate interest, especially when everything has been done to obscure a debate where there should no longer be one:

"Roused by the heat of the struggle, pushed beyond the natural limits of his opinion by the opinions and the excesses of his opponents, a man loses sight of the object of his quest and uses a language which does not correspond with his real feelings and secret instincts. Hence the strange confusion that we are forced to witness." (Furet 1981, 66)

This climate is certainly not the best one in which to start an inquiry into chiropractic. The heat should first be taken out of the subject. But here another difficulty arises: health and everything concerning health are said to be a question for specialists and are the subject of a discourse reserved to them alone. In fact, this discourse is univocal: not only the right to make use of it is not granted, but criticism is always regarded as being out of place.

To describe the evolutions of this discourse would be to tread on forbidden ground. And in any case, it is only recently

that it has been possible to publish in France a history of medicine not researched exclusively by doctors of medicine and this was necessary to make somewhat clearer that which was involved.

Indeed, there is nothing more difficult for a practitioner than to discover the hidden laws of the institutions which have taken command of health and illness. We can see "... people struggling, often in vain, to adjust their inherited institutional framework, with all its incongruities, to what they feel to be their own needs." (Elias 1950, 291) This is the case with all the professions called "liberal," whose basic structure has become set rigidly in a sacred tradition over the centuries.

Between the two World Wars, two English historians compared the evolution of the legal and medical professions which:

was anything but smooth . . . On reflection, it appears that what happened in both cases was the early segregation of practitioners . . . whose function at a later date was realized to be that of specialists. But the associations of these specialists, having attained great power and prestige, attempted to inhibit the development of general practitioners of law and medicine of whose services the public had need. When they could not prevent their appearance, they tried to keep them subservient and the history of both professions is largely concerned with the problems so brought about. (Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933, 304)

More recently, Ivan Waddington concluded on this point that "it would seem likely that similar problems may frequently arise when new professional groups emerge alongside established professional structures." (Waddington 1977, 184) Waddington points out that the history of these tensions is all

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too often focused on individual behavior and the conflicts that arise from this; the unfortunate result is that the attention is diverted from the tensions existing within the professions concerned at the structural level, which alone are important.

This is clearly the case as far as the birth and development of chiropractic are concerned, for the phenomenon is indeed a repetitive one. (Dignat 1888, 226-323) When, in 1655, the French surgeons were excluded from the Faculty of Medicine and attempts were made to equate them with barbers and brand them as ignorant quacks, it was as a consequence of a parliamentary decree secured by the physicians. Not content with this, the physicians of Paris tried to prevent physicians with degrees from other universities from practicing in the capital and refused to recognize their qualifications. The only exception to this concerned the title "Physician to the King", and it is not difficult to understand why the King reserved the right to confer this title.

This type of behavior may have even more curious effects. In England, in 1860, three thousand physicians from the Royal College of Physicians petitioned the Government to reform the dental profession and give it its own status independent of the royal College of Surgeons. This, to prevent the members of the said profession from calling themselves "Dental SURGEONS"! The wheels had turned. We shall not examine here the harm done by such an attitude, but its existence is a good enough reason for a member of the profession to speak out at last, in the hope that he will be heard in preference to those who, certain that they know better than he does, expatiate upon what chiropractic is and, even more, what it is not.

It is evident that medical discourse is inadequate to account for a methodology that does not derive from medicine and that, moreover, has often sought its definition in opposition to it and inevitably outside it. This does not mean that medicine is incompetent to question the methodology, as long as it does not merely seek to bring it into conformity.

It is difficult not to see corporate prejudice at work in the medical accounts of chiropractic, which usually amount to all of three lines. The grocer, Palmer, and his followers are held up to ridicule and dismissed as swindlers or quacks.

Among many possible examples are the articles published in *Le Monde* by Dr. Escoffier-Lambiotte. Without troubling to research the subject, this doctor published the effusions of a medical student who, needing a subject for a thesis, chose to present chiropractors as cheats and charlatans: all in the interests of the patient, naturally! (Escoffier-Lambiotte 1975, 17-18) This is as good as saying there can be no knowledge or history that is not academically recognized, and it further implies that no other kinds exist. It is the reason why some physicians have been concerned to present chiropractic as a mere fad, and a criminal one at that.

One can see how those who deny the existence of the therapeutic practice will find its history even more problematical; and those who accept it reluctantly, as medicine in another guise, will find it difficult to concede that it is different, and that there is such a thing as a history of that difference.

To clarify this point, let us take two kinds of therapy that, to the outsider at least, seem similar. The first is bonesetting, which is a well-established practice existing on the margins

of medicine. The bonesetter will sometimes succeed where the doctor has failed or been powerless to help, but this does not represent a fundamental challenge to the exercise of the different professions of health care, as established in our society. Bonesetting is one of the minor crafts that are often practiced as ancillary to medicine; it may be seen as an outmoded survival from the past, when people knew no better.

Chiropractic is quite different. In France, at least, it is also a political issue. It challenges a monopoly. This explains why the information needed to form a considered judgment has been consistently suppressed. We therefore believe that our study, with all its imperfections, is justified from a historical point of view. It is not surprising that the subject has received so little attention in France, and chiropractic cannot be held solely responsible for this.

Something else that must be borne in mind when attempting any description of chiropractic as a historical phenomenon is that the United States, its birthplace, is a Puritan, Anglo-Saxon and Republican nation. This, no doubt, is an obvious point, but accounts that ignore it are in danger of giving a seriously distorted interpretation.

Puritan ideology has always claimed a special relationship between God and America. Such a privileged relationship implies that the nation should be a model for all humanity, and the idea of moral conversion underlies its history. This is true not only of its religious but also its secular history, as can be seen, for instance, in the War of Independence. The same ideals inform much of the scientific thought of the late 19th century.

One of D. D. Palmer's contemporaries will serve as an example. The zoologist Louis Agassiz's inability to accept Darwin's theory of evolution can be explained by his character and his belief that "nature reveals intelligence." (Thuillier 1983) The historian, Thuillier, has shown that Agassiz was unable to sacrifice his religious and metaphysical convictions to the new doctrine. We should remember him when we come to consider D. D. Palmer's beliefs.

Finally, we must keep in mind that at the time when Palmer announced his discoveries America had just completed her "conquest of the interior". There were no more frontiers and anything was now possible, new sciences included. The political system that triumphed was based on the principle of popular sovereignty, guaranteed by a very strict legal ethic. This ensured that powers were kept separate, and illegality for expediency's sake was not countenanced. In fact, from the time of Chief Justice John Marshall, supreme power was vested in the judiciary, and the Supreme Court became the judge of all other powers, medical included.

Its American roots, however, are not sufficient to explain the aims of chiropractic, nor its survival. It is true that its origins and evolution were influenced by the American context, as was what came to constitute its particular concern but this is not the whole story. This new practice that its founder, D. D. Palmer, was to call "a science, an art, and a philosophy" must also be placed in the context of the scientific knowledge of the time and seen in relation to it. (Palmer 1910) In order to do this, we must look first at the state of the art where the various kinds of therapeutic manipulation practiced at the time were concerned and how they fit into the

general clinical picture. Only then will we be able to evaluate Palmer's contribution.

The origins of chiropractic are certainly unusual. It is probably the only therapeutic discipline to be based on an original experience that was unique, has never really been repeated and probably never will be. Its founder places its origin in a cure for deafness, the famous case of the black, Harvey Lillard. In D. D. Palmer's own words:

Harvey Lillard, a janitor in the Ryan Block where I had my office, had been so deaf for seventeen years that he could not hear the racket of a wagon or the ticking of a watch. I made inquiry as to the cause of his deafness and was informed that when he was exerting himself in a cramped, stooping position he felt something give way in his back and immediately became deaf. An examination showed a vertebra racked from its normal position. I reasoned that if the vertebra was replaced, the man's hearing should be restored. (Palmer 1910)

This happened after two adjustments. Thus it was that for the first time since Hippocrates and Galen an art of healing was defined that was based on the idea of the neuroskeleton as a regulator of tension, and that brought together in a coherent way, in relation to the knowledge of the time, the spine, the nervous system, and most importantly, an energy-based approach that was revolutionary at the time.

From the start, chiropractic came into conflict with other therapeutic methods, and that is why it is important from the outset to place Palmer in context. Nobody could claim that flexibility was a dominant feature of his character!

On his father's side, his family was English and German, and on his mother's, Scottish and Irish. His forebears had emigrated to America, probably in the early 18th century. In typical American fashion, his son B. J. Palmer was to travel to England to obtain a coat of arms for this college, for he had adopted the arms of an extinct line, that of the baronet Geoffroy Palmer, to whom he was totally unrelated. Nor was he related, though from this would have been a happy coincidence, to a Scottish radical by the name of Thomas Fysshe Palmer, a Unitarian pastor and one of Priestley's pupils, who was tried for sedition, found guilty, and sentenced to be deported to Australia by the Secretary of State, Dundas, who described him as "the most determined rebel in the whole of Scotland." (Tomalin 1974)

What is certain is that D.D.'s grandfather, Stephen Palmer, left the State of New York, where his family lived, and went to Canada, where he settled in Port Perry, near Toronto, Ontario. It was here that his father, Thomas Palmer, was born in the year 1824. At that time, Toronto was nothing more than a few log cabins, and when Thomas Palmer married Katherine McVay, all they had for the first born of their six children to sleep in were cradles made of hemlock bark. (Palmer 1967)

D. D. Palmer tells a strange story about his mother, who he says was "as full of superstition as an egg is full of meat." He says he nearly didn't have a mother; she had a twin sister

who died at birth and she herself weighed only one and one-half pounds. This is a fine example of the will to live, even allowing for Palmer's sense of humor!

In contrast, his father, he tells us, was "disposed to reason on the subjects pertaining to life." He was a cobbler, grocer, school teacher and postmaster. This is typical of America, where a man had to take every opportunity and use all his abilities not only to improve the life of his community but, first and foremost, to meet his responsibilities to his family. In view of this background, it seems likely that the Palmer children had a better education than many of their compatriots.

In 1865, when D. D. Palmer was twenty, he went south to seek his fortune with his elder brother, Thomas J. Palmer. The date is significant: they turned their backs on a waste of snow where progress seemed impossible and on a rough life with limited horizons, where frustration was inevitable and the threat of privation never far away. The War of Secession had recently finished, a war the like of which had never been seen before; a total, bloody war that left more than half a million dead, but that brought in its train fantastic industrial opportunities. Lincoln had been assassinated; he, like Palmer and so many others, had been raised on the frontier, and one cannot help feeling that with his death a page of history had been turned, and that life in America would never be the same again. It was, we may think, the belief that anything was now possible that led our two Canadians to cross the frontier at Buffalo on April 3, 1865 (just days before the assassination).

This, of course, was not the only "frontier" that Palmer was to cross in the course of his life, and the present study will attempt to define those other frontiers. For the moment, we want only to point out how deeply Palmer was influenced by his pioneer upbringing; he was never afraid to break new ground or build anew. This, in fact, is how he spent the last years of his life, in an area where he had very little experience. Most of the outstanding men at that period of American history were of this stamp, and all of them owed a great deal to Henry David Thoreau. Thoreau, who died in 1862, had a great influence on Palmer's generation, especially through his insistence that the moral law must be placed above the law of man. Like Palmer, he went to prison for his principles.

It is never easy to give such factors their proper weight and determine their influence on the definition of a new science:

The history of a science would fail in its objective if it neglected to describe the successive efforts, setbacks and fresh starts that went into establishing what is seen today as the proper concern of that science. (Canguilhem 1977)

To this day, most attempts to explain chiropractic have been based on the hope of using medicine, or rather specific trends in medicine, to justify a practice the origins of which lie elsewhere. This can be a useful procedure to counter criticism founded on ignorance or prejudice, and we ourselves have used it on occasion. (Gaucher 1972) To stop there, however, would be to ignore the various influences that made it possible, and that we shall now attempt to describe in the full dissertation.

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